

**HURRICANE IKE PRESS CONFERENCE  
SENATE PRESS GALLERY  
SEPTEMBER 16, 2008**

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** This is the first time I've been in the new gallery – they've updated a little bit. Let me start by saying that this group represents those in the Texas delegation whose constituents are very much affected by Hurricane Ike. That would be Rep. Gene Green, Rep. Al Green, Rep. Louie Gohmert from East Texas, and then the Texans who are on the Appropriations Committee on the House side. Four of the five are here. The fifth, Rep. John Culberson, is from Houston. He's in Houston today. The other five: Rep. Kay Granger, Rep. John Cater, Rep. Chet Edwards and Rep. Ciro Rodriguez.

I so appreciate this kind of effort that we are making. We call it Team Texas when one of our constituents is in trouble, all of us come together in the appropriate committee assignments to help those in need. You can see from the turnout today that that is happening right now. We are Team Texas. Our appropriators are already working on Texas being part of the disaster supplemental that will be coming through Congress. Our coastal area is in a bad state. I was there on Sunday. I saw my birthplace underway. I saw the devastation on Bolaver Peninsula where there once were house and now only stilts. I went all through the Houston area and have been in constant contact with our county judges and mayors.

What we are here to do today is to say that while the President – which we very much appreciate – is on the ground in Texas, we are here working on a package that we will all support that will help this disaster recovery for our great state.

Let me mention a couple of things. First of all, all of us here signed a letter to the president yesterday asking him to extend the hundred percent reimbursement for debris removal. It had been in place for 72 hours and he has extended that to two weeks. He announced that this morning.

That is going to be very helpful to the areas affected, knowing that they will be able to get reimbursement for extra costs of removing trees from the streets, boats from the causeway and all through Galveston, and also taking the trees off power lines. The key is getting power back to the 2 million residents who still don't have it. Power is the first thing. We need to have that done, the president did it and we appreciate it.

The second thing is, we have now from FEMA the information on hotels that people who cannot get back into their homes who are going to have extended stays can go to and the hotels, motels will be directly reimbursed from FEMA. There are 1,100 hotels in Texas participating with FEMA. The information is at the FEMA website. There's an 800 number. I will give you that at the end of this press conference. There's also a website that I can give you the address for. It is probably in my release.

So that you can put that out so that everyone who is in a shelter now which is 37,000 people will know that they can go to a participating hotel-motel and get shelter that is going to last a little

longer. They are saying that it is going to be probably a month before people can go in to some of these areas particularly Galveston County, which is the hardest hit at this point.

**REP. GENE GREEN:** My name is Gene Green, and I represent a district in east and north Houston. Ike actually came over our district in the eastern part – in Baytown, Texas. Seeing the devastation, so much of our district is still without power, literally from downtown Houston all the way out to Baytown. We're looking at those numbers, and it is improving compared to yesterday when I was there.

We're doing two things right now. One, we're making sure those P.O.D. centers that FEMA is staffing very well yesterday – there were some problems making it seamless today. I have staff there because we don't have power in our offices in the district – they're actually at these P.O.D.s making sure we're working on that, making sure FEMA – we don't want to see a repeat of Katrina, and we're not.

Texas is different, and we get things done on a bipartisan basis and that's what Sen. Hutchison talked about. The power restoration – most of the folks in our district did not leave. So, they didn't leave, but they're living in very terrible conditions. I was actually walking doors in north Houston yesterday and seeing people living outside because they can't take...

**REP. AL GREEN:** Thank you, Senator Hutchison. I want to thank the leadership in general for the response that has taken place. Speaker Pelosi has issued a statement indicating her support for Texas and the areas that have been devastated.

I'd also like to thank the faith-based community in Houston, Texas for providing shelters and for stepping up to the plate and helping persons in a time of need. The Red Cross is supporting these efforts, but those churches and those pastors really merit a special expression of our appreciation who have been helpful.

My district is the south side of Houston. We have devastation that you cannot imagine. You do have to see some of this to believe it; trees on homes, trees within the street, debris that is all over the streets and yards and homes of person. We have traffic signals that are not working in the city. We have a need for the basic necessities: water, ice and food. I am pleased to say that the P.O.D. have been established, but this is bigger than my district and it's bigger than Houston.

I went to Galveston. I have seen the devastation in Galveston, and I want to assure you that we are going to help Galveston return to normalcy. Scores of boats are along the causeway, but one side of the causeway can be traversed.

The mayor of Galveston issued a clarion call for help, and I have assured her, as was the case with other who are in attendance at the press conference, that we are going to do what we can to help those who have been severely devastated in places like Galveston.

I will simply close with this: Sen. Hutchison has been a true leader when there has been a necessity for us to come together to make a difference for all Texans. She steps up to the plate. I

am confident that with her leadership and with the fellowship that we have here with all of my colleagues, that we are going to continue to make a difference in the lives of Texans with this aid package. I appreciate very much what she has done to assemble us for this effort that will merit the consideration of all Texans, and we will survive this. I assure you.

**REP. LOUIE GOHMERT:** I'm Louie Gohmert from the first district of Texas. My district starts to the south a couple of counties up from the coast. Texans often take a hit nationally when people talk about "they're just so proud of their state." It gets a little old. But when you see a disaster like this, and you see people working shoulder to shoulder to help each other, not caring about party not caring about anything but helping each other, then it is very moving at times. A little exhausting too. I had one sheriff late Saturday night. His office was running off a generator saying, "You know I'm a democrat" as we were trying to help him get supplies. And I said "you know I don't care."

But my district also has the distinction of having thousands and thousands of evacuees come up and stay there. And then we got hit at the southern end with hurricane winds and rains. So, there are generators running all over trying to keep evacuees comfortable. We missed power at my house for a couple days, but I didn't know it until late Sunday. But anyway, it is Texans coming together. Let me also mention when it comes to energy, these people pointed out there are no hybrid generators. We can't go plug a generator in to get electricity generated. It comes from gas or diesel. So there is the need for additional energy there as well. People are hurting, and we appreciate the rest of the nation helping. We appreciate so much the bipartisan work in Texas to try to help Texans.

**REP: CHET EDWARDS:** I'm Congressman Chet Edwards from Waco. Texas citizens and family trying to recover from the devastation of hurricane Ike deserve our prayers, our support and our cooperation. And they will have all three. I want to thank Sen. Hutchison for leading this effort to see that team Texas is working hand in hand to provide the quickest possible and most important recovery needs where the federal government has a role to play. The key point that I would want to make is this: based on conversations I've had this morning with key people in the appropriations committee in the house I am confident that before congress leaves Washington on October 1<sup>st</sup> we will pass emergency appropriations to help Texas citizens and families recover from hurricane Ike. We will work closely with Senator Hutchison who is our senior member of the appropriations committee in the Senate to see that that gets done.

To put this in perspective, and the reason it's so important to work as a team as senator Hutchison has mentioned is this: we will have to do in one week what most states normally have three or four months to do. That is to take an inventory of damage, determine what federal programs have an appropriate role to play in helping people and communities get back on their feet, and then get that legislation passed through the congress before the end of the next week. We will get that job done.

**REP. KAY GRANGER:** Hi, I'm Kay Granger. Thank you Sen. Hutchison for your leadership. This is very important to bring us all together.

I'm fortunate to be from a district that was not impacted, but we did send people with relief before the storm hit. There were truckloads of people who came from cities all over Texas – city employees that went down as the storm was hitting to make sure they could offer help.

I was talking to Kevin Brady this morning and said, 'We are here for all of you. We will do whatever it takes.' We are a team, and I am very proud of the way Texas has reacted and we will continue to continue to act quickly – and we will.

Thank you.

**REP. JOHN CARTER:** I'm John Carter from Central Texas, Round Rock. All we got was a little wind, but I can tell you this – we dispatched our first responders to the coast according to plan. We received our evacuees from Brazoria County according to the plan. Texas executed its plan well. Now we're going to execute this plan well here in the U.S. Congress.

There is nothing prouder than to stand up here on a bipartisan basis and say the one thing you can count on in Texas – whoever it is, if they're from Texas, we're there to stand beside them. And you're going to see that demonstrated within the next few days.

**REP. CIRO RODRIQUEZ:** I'm Congressman Ciro Rodriguez, 23<sup>rd</sup> congressional district. Personally now I have two families, brother in laws in Baytown and Texas City who are staying at home. We know how serious it is. I want to personally thank all the first responders out there especially all the volunteers who are working hard to respond to some of the needs that they have. I also want to also take this opportunity to thank Sen. Hutchison for your efforts not only on this but continuously in a variety of other areas. In my area, we didn't get any rain whatsoever. I do have some major flooding as a result of another major storm which displaced 500 people in the Presidio area. But that's another storm through the Mexican side. We're going to do what we can to try to make this happen. Without electricity, without potable water we've got to move as quickly as possible. So, once again, Senator, I thank you for being there for all of us.

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** Thank you. Thank you very much all of you for the great words of support.

**REPORTER:** Do you have a rough dollar approximation how much money will be needed?

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** We don't yet because there are many areas we haven't gotten into yet. FEMA is doing search and rescue right now, but they have not gone in for damage assessments. I know the Corps of Engineers is very, very concerned about its needs because so much was destroyed in the coastal area – navigation equipment and that kind of thing – that will affect our waterways. I would say that is going to be one of the largest parts of the package we would put forward.

**REPORTER:** Can you tell me a little about its impact on the energy sector, and if you think oil and gas will need federal assistance to get back online – or some oil released from the strategic oil reserve?

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** Certainly we've talked about whether there would be a need for release from the S.P.R. That is no apparent right now. It will depend on when those refineries will be able to come back online. Most of them are down, and partly due to flooding, but also mostly it's power.

They are estimating it will be one week from when they went down, and maybe even ten days before they can get back. If they can get back sooner, then the need for the release from S.P.R. would be less, but it is not yet determined. The priority is to get those plants up and running again so that we can get the refineries operating. It's just a little early to know, but it is definitely a possibility that that would be considered if we see big shortage occur later in the week.

**REPORTER:** I'm just wanted to ask about the legislative vehicle. You mentioned this is going to be a supplemental?

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** Yes, I would imagine right now that it would go on the C.R. There is a disaster package that has already been in the works, and my best guess is that will go on the supplemental.

**REPORTER:** There is talk about including this in another stimulus. Would you support that?

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** I do not think it should go in the stimulus. I think it should go in the C.R. It should be a disaster package that stands on its own that goes through the C.R. There are just too many problems with stimulus package and getting agreement on that in a week would be very difficult.

I think the cleaner way to do it on a bipartisan basis is to put it on the C.R.

**REPORTER:** Some Republicans are threatening to vote against this C.R. if it doesn't include lifting the ban on off-shore drilling. Isn't that going to put Texas Republicans in a box?

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** There are certain conflicts in several of the measures that are going to be coming through then end, and I think we'll just have to take it one issue at a time.

**REPORTER:** Can you tell me who else you have spoken with in the Senate? Have you spoke with Chairman Byrd or Senator Reid?

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** Yes, we have started the process. I haven't spoken with Harry myself or Sen. Byrd, but we are talking to their staffs. They are very supportive of this effort. We are also talking to the other staff people who have disaster packages already in place. They have agreed that ours will go in with it.

I just got back this morning, actually. I was at home this morning and left, so I've been out working on the ground with their emergency needs. I will talk to my colleagues, but all the staff has been very supportive of putting the Ike package with the disaster package that has already been put together. I believe we have a strong bipartisan consensus on that.

**REPORTER:** It has been reported that the oil rigs in Texas have been virtually undamaged from the storm. What do you think that says about whether off-shore drilling is environmentally sound or not?

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** I think it says a lot. There was virtually no oil spill from Katrina. I have not heard a final report on the rigs from this hurricane, but if in fact there has been no oil spill from the rigs, it will show that you can drill off-shore environmentally safely. Let's look at this when we're finished with all of the assessments because Rita was a pretty tough hurricane as well and we didn't have it then. I think it could show that we can drill in water, whether it's Pacific, Atlantic or the Gulf of Mexico, and withstand some of the toughest hurricanes of the last 100 years.

**REP. GENE GREEN:** The House today will be considering a bill for expansion of outer-continental shelf drilling, and that was the biggest issue. I think as Senator said, our history shows that there have been more oil spills from importing oil than from our domestic production.

As far as I understood, there are two rigs that are loose from their moorings, but the other rigs were in place. But it's still going to take a while to get those back up and sending product again, whether it be natural gas or oil. So, that's why the S.P.R. may be needed as soon as we get the refineries up to accept it.

I think it's a good example that we can produce domestically, and show the world we don't have to ask them to increase their production when we can produce our own.

**REPORTER:** Do you have a time table for when you'll get a good number from the agencies?

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** Oh I would say in the next week we should have at least enough estimates to put numbers in. Our appropriators are asking for that, and we may have to estimate and then just know that we'll act responsibly. And if we won't need anything we wouldn't take it. If we're working on this deadline, we've got to have the money available, and then we can deal with excess if we have to later.

**REPORTER:** Can you scale it at all at this point?

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** It'd be very hard when especially in Galveston; we haven't gotten in yet to what their infrastructure needs are going to be. I'd say in the corps of engineers we may be looking at a billion dollars. But I don't think we know yet about the Port Arthur-Beaumont-Orange area, Galveston and then there's a whole coastline area in Harris County that I flew over that was very hard hit, Kima, Clear Lake. So, I just think we've got to take every step we can. We will have an estimate, but it's probably going to be into next week before it's anywhere near a sure prognostication.

**EDWARDS:** Can I add one footnote to that? I hope we can make something positive about this terrible tragedy when it comes to preventing future flooding in Houston. This hurricane should make it absolutely clear that the federal government must invest more to develop the bayou and flood control system in Harris County. Year after year after year, from democratic to republican administration, we have underinvested in that flood control system. We ought to learn once and for all, it's better to spend a dollar up front than a hundred dollars after a tragedy has occurred. That would not have stopped all the tragedy, obviously. But it could have reduced significantly some of the flooding. I know Congressman Green and Sen. Hutchison have worked on this.

**REP. GOHMERT:** Could I add something? With regard to making the assessment, let me just tell you. I've been on many of the conference calls with the county officials and other government officials. The questions are generally, "who needs water, who needs food, who needs search and rescue, where is it needed, we know your power is out, we're trying to get to that." The question of how much damage you had doesn't make its way into those conversations yet. There are other people who are working on that, but right now the focus is on helping those who are hurting the most. And unfortunately as Chet pointed out, we got to come up with a number quickly as we're going through trying to help those. But again, Kay, I appreciate your leadership on this. I always enjoy working with you.

**SEN. HUTCHISON:** Let me just end by saying that Sen. Cornyn and much of the Houston Delegation is with the president in Houston. Those who are not there are here working. So, again, our team is working in both places, and we're trying to work the appropriations side. That is my biggest responsibility right now, but I did get to see it first hand with the secretary. I really appreciated so much Sec. Chertoff coming down and talking to the people on the ground in Jefferson County, Galveston County and Harris County. He made a lot of headway just by listening to concerns and fixing problems on the ground on Sunday. So, we're all coming together and working as a team with local and state governments as well. Thank you very much.